

In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

(Acts Synod Lincoln 1992, Art. 50, IV B 1-7)

2.6 Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise

Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise
c/o 110 West 27th Street, Hamilton ON, L9C 5A1

REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD NEERLANDIA 2001

Esteemed brothers,

The *Standing Committee for the Publication of the 'Book of Praise'* hereby submits the report on its activities in regard to the mandate given to the Committee by General Synod Fergus 1998.

1.0 Printing and Distribution:

The Committee authorized a re-print of the *Book of Praise* shortly after Synod Fergus 1998. This edition incorporates the revised text of the *Nicene Creed* adopted by *Synod Fergus 1998 (Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 - VII C, p. 179)*.

The Committee authorized the printing of just over 7950 copies in 1998/99, of which 2867 copies have been sold to churches, 739 copies to schools and 3624 copies to bookstores and other. Geographically, the distribution is as follows: Canada - 5635 copies; United States of America - 380 copies; Australia - 1053 copies; Other - 162 copies.

2.0 Renewal of Printing & Distribution Contract:

The Committee recommends that the contract with Premier Printing Ltd. be extended for a five year period under its original terms, to be reviewed in the year 2006.

3.0 Corporate Status:

The Committee has maintained its status as a corporation, and all necessary documents for this purpose have been kept up to date. This also includes filing the annual *Income Tax* forms with Revenue Canada, even though the Committee does not operate under an annual budget, and the Corporation does not generate an income or a profit.

4.0 Publicity:

The Committee continues to respond to the various requests for information regarding the *Book of Praise*. Also in the past three years,

requests originated from individuals and church groups outside of our Federation of Churches. In particular, we wish to mention the interest expressed by the *Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church*, Saint Louis, Missouri, USA. It is encouraging to note the interest in and respect for the rich heritage of the Reformed faith as it is expressed in the Psalms, the Hymns and the *Three Forms of Unity*.

The Committee deals with the requests for the use of materials from the *Book of Praise* on a per-request-basis, and responds in a manner which seeks to maintain the purpose and intent of the *Book of Praise*. Also in this respect, the Committee is encouraged by recent audio recordings and concert performances by choral groups featuring Psalms taken from the *Book of Praise*. When permission for use of the text of the psalms and/or hymns is granted for such a purpose, it is expected that full acknowledgement of the *Book of Praise* as source is made.

With gratitude, the Committee notes that the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* continues to function actively in all aspects within our Federation of Churches.

4.1 Contact with the Official Website Committee

The two Committees met in order to identify areas of mutual interest and concern. We are pleased to note that the *Book of Praise* is now accessible electronically via the website of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Issues around copyright and 'fair use' continue to be thorny ones in this technological age. We will continue to maintain contact with the Official Website Committee.

4.2 Availability of harmonizations and organ editions of the Psalms and Hymns

In order to foster an increased awareness of the availability of harmonizations of the Psalms and Hymns, the Committee notes that the following editions are available on a regular basis. [Please note that suggested prices are approximations only!]:

Landsman, S.	<i>Koraal book 150 psalmen</i>	\$ 91.00
Nieuwenhuyse, J.	<i>Miscellaneous books on the psalms</i>	N/A
Schippers, L.	<i>Miscellaneous books on the psalms</i>	N/A
Worp	<i>Psalmen ritmisch</i>	84.00
Zwart, W.H.	<i>Psalmen en enige gezangen</i>	106.00

These items are available from: Inheritance Publications
Church Music & Records
Box 154, Neerlandia, AB
T0G 1R0 CANADA
(tel.: 780-674-3949; FAX: 775-890-9118;
email: inhpubl@telusplanet.net)

5.0 Mandate:

With respect to the mandate the Committee received from Synod Fergus 1998 we may report the following:

5.1 **Overleaf Musical Notation (Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 III C1, p. 173)**

The committee has instructed Premier Printing Ltd. to prepare the overleaf notation for all the psalms and hymns. This preparation included a new typesetting of the music, and a new configuration of the text of the overleaf stanzas. In order to keep costs to the churches down, we have not included a copy of the full overleaf notation for all 150 Psalms and 65 Hymns. Rather, we will make available (via *Premier Printing*) a sampling of 15 psalms.

Observations:

- a. Overleaf notation for all the Psalms and Hymns will add approximately 100 pages to the *Book of Praise*. This represents an increase in bulk of approximately 16 %.
- b. It is anticipated that with the overleaf notation, the cost of the *Book of Praise* will increase from \$ 19.00 per copy, to \$ 25.50 (\$Cdn.; retail) per copy.

5.2 **NIV References in the prose section of the Book of Praise (Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 IV C1, p.176)**

The committee prepared the prose section consisting of the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Liturgical Forms* with NIV Bible references. The procedure followed included:

- a. A re-examination of all NIV proof texts and reference texts found in footnotes and margins to ensure the validity of the intended application for each text. This applies in case of indirect references.
- b. The insertion of the italicized NIV text in the body of the prose text in the *Book of Praise*. This applies in case of a direct quotation.

Further, in an effort to strive for consistency, the committee followed the capitalization used in the NIV. This means that pronouns referring to God are in lower case lettering.

Observations:

After carefully examining all proof texts, indirect reference texts, as well as direct reference texts, the committee is confident that the application of the NIV references does not alter the intent or purpose of the reference.

As the NIV text has been adopted for use by our churches, the committee did not deem it necessary to include the entire text of the prose section in this *Report to the Churches*. Rather, a sampling has been enclosed as *Appendix A*.

5.3 **NIV Bible references and the Prayers in the prose section of the Book of Praise (Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 IV C1, p.176)**

The committee also adapted the Prayers in the prose section of the *Book of Praise*. The procedure followed is similar to the one described

under Section 5.2 of this report. Also in the prayers, direct and indirect references to scripture passages are changed to the NIV text. No footnote references are included.

The change from “Thee & Thou” to “you” necessitated other modifications as well. In addition to the obvious adjustments to ‘verb endings’, changes were made to update some of the archaic expressions. In a few instances, long sentences were divided into shorter segments.

The full text of the Prayers (*Revised*) may be found in *Appendix B*.

6.0 **Other Matters:**

6.1 **Changes to the Psalms and Hymns (*Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 IV C2, p.176*)**

Although *Synod Fergus* decided “(t)o mandate the Committee not to proceed with changes to the Psalms and Hymns”, it ought to be noted that during the past three years, the committee did receive requests (and in some instances, specific suggestions and recommendations) for the additional Hymns.

6.2 **Future Revision**

The implementation of the recommendation to the churches to adopt a new bible translation for use by the churches may imply a substantial modification to the rhyming of the Psalms to reflect the text of the NIV. It is the opinion of the committee that such a substantial change in the future ought to be planned carefully in the present.

The committee seeks direction from Synod in this matter.

6.3 **Input from Australian Sister Churches**

Our Australian sister churches make full use of the *Book of Praise*. As Committee, we are thankful for this. We express our hope that within the English-singing world, the Anglo-Genevan Psalter may indeed continue to serve for many year to come.

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* receives its mandate directly from the Canadian and American reformed Churches. By implication, no input from the Australian sister churches is solicited when considering revisions to the text of the *Book of Praise*. Although not part of the Recommendations, *Synod Fergus* in its considerations alludes to taking “into consideration the input of our Australian sister churches” (*Acts Fergus 1998, Art. 140 V B1, p.175*). Given that there is no direct relationship, how and by what venues might we initiate a formal request for input? How might we consider unsolicited input and suggestions from our Australian sister churches? As Committee, we seek direction from Synod in this matter.

6.4 **The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise and the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity.**

On several occasions during the past years, the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity have reported publicly (e.g., via *Clarion*)

on their discussions. These reports included references that may affect directly the mandate of the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise*.

The committee urges Synod to consider the potential implications as it articulates the next mandate for the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise*.

7.0 **Further Recommendations**

We make the following recommendations:

7.1 **Committee Membership**

That the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise* be continued and that the size of the Committee be kept to four members in order to carry out its regular mandate. Should the mandate of the Committee be expanded considerably, the Committee recommends that an *Ad Hoc* Committee be appointed. Close cooperation between such Committees is essential.

Rev. B.J.Berends is due to retire from the Committee in 2001 (*Acts 1995*, p.86).

For health reasons, br. T.M.P.Vanderven has requested to be relieved from the Committee.

7.2 **Committee Mandate**

- i. To function according to the arrangements for publishing and distribution accepted by *General Synod Cloverdale 1983 (Acts 1983, pp. 297-299)*.
- ii. To maintain its corporate status in order to be able to protect the interests of the Canadian Reformed Churches in all matters concerning the *Book of Praise*.
- iii. To foster an increased awareness of the existence of the *Book of Praise* among others and to promote the availability of a book of harmonizations facilitating the use of the *Book of Praise* in the English-speaking world.
- iv. To serve as the address to which any correspondence regarding the *Book of Praise* can be directed.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. B.J.Berends

Rev. C.Bosch (convener)

Mr. T.M.P.Vanderven

Mrs. C.van Halen-Faber (reporter)

APPENDIX A:**RE: NIV BIBLE REFERENCES IN THE PROSE SECTION OF THE BOOK OF PRAISE***A SAMPLING TAKEN FROM THE BELGIC CONFESSION***THE BELGIC CONFESSION***[text of Introduction remains unchanged]*Sample Articles to illustrate NIV references: *Articles 1, 2, 3, 14, 21, 26***TRUE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION****Containing the Summary of the Doctrine of God and of the Eternal Salvation of Man****ARTICLE I THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD**

We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth¹ that there is only one God,² who is a simple and spiritual Being;³ He is eternal,⁴ incomprehensible,⁵ invisible,⁶ immutable,⁷ infinite,⁸ almighty,⁹ perfectly wise,¹⁰ just,¹¹ good,¹² and the overflowing fountain of all good.¹³

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Rom 10:10. |
| 2 | Deut 6:4; I Cor 8:4, 6; I Tim 2:5. |
| 3 | Jn 4:24. |
| 4 | Ps 90:2. |
| 5 | Rom 11:33. |
| 6 | Col 1:15; I Tim 6:16. |
| 7 | Jas 1:17. |
| 8 | I Kings 8:27; Jer 23:24. |
| 9 | Gen 17:1; Mt 19:26; Rev 1:8. |
| 10 | Rom 16:27. |
| 11 | Rom 3:25, 26; Rom 9:14; Rev 16:5, 7. |
| 12 | Mt 19:17. |
| 13 | Jas 1:17. |

ARTICLE 2 HOW GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO US

We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book,¹ wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to see *clearly God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature -*, as the apostle says in Rom 1:20. All these things are sufficient to convict men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word² as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Ps 19:1-4. |
| 2 | Ps 19:7, 8; I Cor 1:18-21. |

ARTICLE 3 THE WORD OF GOD

We confess that this Word of God did not have its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pet 1:21). Thereafter, in His special care for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing¹ and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law.² Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.³

- 1 Ex 34:27; Ps 102:18; Rev 1:11, 19.
- 2 Ex 31:18.
- 3 2 Tim 3:16.

ARTICLE 14 THE CREATION AND FALL OF MAN AND HIS INCAPABILITY OF DOING WHAT IS TRULY GOOD

We believe that God created man of dust from the ground¹ and He made and formed him in His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy.² His will could conform to the will of God in every respect. But, when man was in this high position, he did not appreciate it nor did he value his excellency. He gave ear to the words of the devil and wilfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse.³ For he transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; by his sin he broke away from God, who was his true life; he corrupted his whole nature. By all this he made himself liable to physical and spiritual death.⁴

Since man became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had once received from God.⁵ He has nothing left but some small traces, which are sufficient to make man inexcusable.⁶ For whatever light is in us has changed into darkness,⁷ as Scripture teaches us, *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it* (Jn 1:5); where the apostle John calls mankind darkness.

Therefore we reject all teaching contrary to this concerning the free will of man, since man is a slave to sin (Jn 8:34) and a man can receive only what is given him from heaven (Jn 3:27). For who dares to boast that he of himself can do any good, when Christ says: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him* (Jn 6:44)? Who will glory in his own will, when he understands that *the sinful mind is hostile to God* (Rom 8:7)? Who can speak of his knowledge, since *the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God* (1 Cor 2:14)? In short, who dares to claim anything, when he realizes that *we are not competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God* (2 Cor 3:5)? Therefore what the apostle says must justly remain sure and firm: *It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose* (Phil 2:13). For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and will of God unless Christ has brought it about; as He teaches us: *Apart from me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5).

- 1 Gen 2:7; Gen 3:19; Eccles 12:7.
- 2 Gen 1:26, 27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.
- 3 Gen 3:16-19; Rom 5:12.
- 4 Gen 2:17; Eph 2:1; Eph 4:18.
- 5 Ps 94:11; Rom 3:10; Rom 8:6.
- 6 Rom 1:20, 21.
- 7 Eph 5:8.

ARTICLE 21 THE SATISFACTION OF CHRIST OUR HIGH PRIEST

We believe that Jesus Christ was confirmed by an oath to be a High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.¹ He presented Himself in our place before His Father, appeasing God's wrath by His full satisfaction,² offering Himself on the tree of the cross, where He poured out His precious blood to purge away our sins,³ as the prophets had foretold.⁴ For it is written, *the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He was numbered with the transgressors* (Is 53:5,7,12),⁶ and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though he had first declared Him innocent.⁷ He was forced to restore what He did not steal (Ps 69:4). He died as *the righteous for the unrighteous* (1 Pet 3:18).⁸ He suffered in body and soul,⁹ feeling the horrible punishment caused by our sins, and *his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground* (Luke 22:44). Finally, He exclaimed, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me* (Mt 27:46)? All this He endured for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we justly say, with Paul, that we know nothing *except Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1 Cor 2:2). We consider *everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord* (Phil 3:8). We find comfort in His wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means of reconciliation with God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which the believers are perfected for all times (Heb 10:14).¹⁰ This is also the reason why the angel of God called Him Jesus, that is, Saviour *because he will save his people from their sins* (Mt 1:21).¹¹

1 Ps 110:4; Heb 7:15-17.

2 Rom 4:25; Rom 5:8, 9; Rom 8:32; Gal 3:13; Col 2:14; Heb 2:9, 17; Heb 9:11-15.

3 Acts 2:23; Phil 2:8; 1 Tim 1:15; Heb 9:22; 1 Pet 1:18, 19; 1 Jn 1:7; Rev 7:14.

4 Lk 24:25-27; Rom 3:21; 1 Cor 15:3.

5 1 Pet 2:24.

6 Mark 15:28

7 Jn 18:38

8 Rom 5:6

9 Ps 22:15

10 Heb 7:26-28; Heb 9:25-28

11 Lk 1:31; Acts 4:12

ARTICLE 26 CHRIST'S INTERCESSION

We believe that we have no access to God except through the only Mediator¹ and Advocate Jesus Christ the righteous.² For this purpose He became man, uniting together the divine and human nature, that we men might not be barred from but have access to the divine majesty.³ This Mediator, however, whom the Father has ordained between Himself and us, should not frighten us by His greatness, so that we look for another according to our fancy. There is no creature in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ.⁴ *Who, being in very nature God, made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant* (Phil 2:6, 7), and *was made like his brothers in every way* (Heb 2:17). If, therefore, we had to look for another intercessor, could we find one who loves us more than He who laid down His life for us, even while we were His enemies (Rom 5:8, 10)? If we had to look for one who has authority and power, who has more than He who is seated at the right

hand of the Father⁵ and who has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18)? Moreover, who will be heard more readily than God's own well-beloved Son?⁶

Therefore it was pure lack of trust which introduced the custom of dishonouring the saints rather than honouring them, doing what they themselves never did nor required. On the contrary, they constantly rejected such honour according to their duty,⁷ as appears from their writings. Here one ought not to bring in our unworthiness, for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own worthiness, but only on the basis of the excellence and worthiness of Jesus Christ,⁸ whose righteousness is ours by faith.⁹

Therefore with good reason, to take away from us this foolish fear or rather distrust, the author of Hebrews says to us that Jesus Christ was made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high Priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:17,18). Further, to encourage us more to go to Him, he says: Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:14, 15).¹⁰ The same letter says: Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:19, 22). Also, because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Heb 7:24, 25).¹¹ What more is needed? Christ Himself says: I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6). Why should we look for another advocate? It has pleased God to give us His Son as our Advocate. Let us then not leave Him for another, or even look for another, without ever finding one. For when God gave Him to us, He knew very well that we were sinners.

In conclusion, according to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Christ our only Mediator,¹² as we are taught in the Lord's prayer.¹³ We rest assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in His Name (Jn 16:23).¹⁴

1 I Tim 2:5.

2 I Jn 2:1.

3 Eph 3:12.

4 Mt 11:28; Jn 15:13; Eph 3:18,19; I Jn 4:10.

5 Heb 1:3; Heb 8:1.

6 Mt 3:17; Jn 11:42; Eph 1:6.

7 Acts 10:26; Acts 14:15.

8 Jer 17:5, 7; Acts 4:12.

9 I Cor 1:30.

10 Jn 10:9; Eph 2:18; Heb 9:24.

11 Rom 8:34.

12 Heb 13:15.

13 Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4.

14 Jn 14:13

APPENDIX B:

RE: THE PRAYERS [REVISED]

PRAYERS

1. A GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS AND PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON AND ON DAYS OF FASTING AND PRAYER

O eternal and merciful God and Father, we humble ourselves before your great majesty, for we have frequently and grievously sinned against you. We acknowledge that if you should enter into judgment with us, we would deserve nothing but temporal and eternal death. We are deeply conscious of the fact that we are conceived and born in sin, and that all manner of evil desires against you and our neighbour fill our hearts. We continually transgress your commandments, failing to do what you have commanded us, and doing that which you have expressly forbidden. We all, like sheep, have gone astray and each of us has turned to his own way. We acknowledge our waywardness, and are heartily sorry for all our sins. We confess that our transgressions are innumerable, and that we have nothing with which to repay our debt. Therefore we are not worthy to be called your children, nor to lift up our eyes to you in heaven.

Nevertheless, O Lord God and gracious Father, we know that you do not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn to you and live. We know that your mercy toward those who turn to you is infinite; and so we take courage to call upon you from the depths of our hearts, trusting in our Mediator Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Have compassion on us and forgive us all our sins for Christ's sake. Wash us in the pure fountain of His blood, so that we may become clean and white as snow. Cover our nakedness with His righteousness, for the glory of your Name. Free our understanding from all blindness, and our hearts from all stubbornness and rebellion.

Open now the mouth of your servant, and fill it with your wisdom and knowledge, that he may boldly proclaim your Word in all its purity. Prepare our hearts to receive it, to understand it, and to preserve it. Inscribe your law, as you have promised, on our hearts, and give us the desire and the strength to walk in the ways of your precepts, to the praise and glory of your Name, and to the edification of the church.

All this, gracious Father, we implore in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Or: ... who taught us to pray, *Our Father* ...)

2. A PRAYER FOR ALL THE NEEDS OF CHRISTENDOM

Almighty and merciful God, we confess that we are unworthy to come before you in prayer. Our consciences accuse us and our sins testify against us. We also know that you are a righteous judge who punishes the sins of those who transgress your commandments.

But you, LORD, have commanded us to call upon you in all our needs and have in mercy promised to listen to our petitions. We realize that this is not because of our merits, for we have none, but because of the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you have appointed as our Mediator and Advocate. Therefore we forsake all other help and refuse to take our refuge in anything but your mercy alone.

Heavenly Father, you have showered upon us so many blessings that we are not able to comprehend them, much less to count them. We especially thank you that you have led us to the light of your truth and to the knowledge of your holy gospel. Time and again, however, we have ungratefully forgotten your benefits, deserted you, by following the desires of our own hearts. We have not honoured you as we should have. We have grievously sinned against you. If you should bring us into judgment, we could expect nothing but condemnation and eternal death. But, LORD, look upon the face of your Anointed, hide your eyes from our sins and remove your wrath through His intercession. Work in us mightily by your Spirit, that He may daily put to death our sinful nature and work the daily renewal of our life.

As it pleases you that we should pray for all mankind, we implore you, bless the spreading of your holy gospel, that it may be proclaimed and received universally so that the whole world may know you. Enlighten the ignorant, strengthen the weak. May everyone by word and deed magnify your holy Name. To this end send faithful servants into your harvest and equip them to discharge the duties of their office diligently. Destroy, we pray, all false teachers, fierce wolves and hirelings who seek their own honour and profit rather than the honour of your holy Name and the salvation of men.

Graciously preserve and govern your Christian churches throughout the world in the unity of the true faith and in godliness of life, that your kingdom may come day by day. Destroy the kingdom of Satan until the perfection of your kingdom arrive when you shall be all in all.

We pray for the mission among Jews, Moslems, and heathen, who live without hope and without you in the world. Grant your blessing upon the spreading of the gospel among those who still call themselves Christians but have deviated from your truth in doctrine and life.

Remember all Christian instruction and all who are engaged in it. Bless all societies which, in accordance with your holy Word, seek to hallow your Name, to further your kingdom, and to fulfil your will. Be with all Christian institutions of mercy and grant those who work there the full measure of your love.

We also pray for the civil government, for our Queen and her house, and for all national, provincial, and local authorities, whom you have set over us. Grant that they may perform their task in such a manner that the rule of the King of kings is acknowledged by them and by their subjects. May they as your servants more and more oppose the kingdom of Satan, which is a kingdom of lawlessness. Grant that under the rule and protection of the governing authorities we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way.

We pray for all your children who suffer persecution for the sake of your Name and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Comfort them with your Holy Spirit and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. Do not permit the memory of your Name to be removed from the earth. Do not let the enemies of your truth have occasion to dishonour and blaspheme your Name. But if it is your will that persecuted Christians by their death bear witness to the truth and glorify your Name, comfort them in their sufferings. May they accept their trials as from your fatherly hand and remain faithful in life and death to the honour of your Name, to the edification of the church, and to their salvation.

We remember before you all those whom you are chastening with poverty, imprisonment, physical illness, or spiritual distress. May it please you to heal the sick and to restore soundness of mind to the mentally ill. Surround those who

are handicapped in body or mind with your care and bless all that is done to help them. Lift up those who are cast down. Be a Comforter to the widowers, a Protector to the widows, a Father to the orphans. Show your love to the lonely, your strength to the weak, your grace to the dying, your sustaining power to the bereaved. Grant that all trials may yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Glorify yourself in the faith, love, and endurance of all those whom you have called to your eternal glory in Christ.

○ LORD, take us and our dear ones into your care and keeping. Watch over our families. Strengthen the expectant mothers and grant them a good delivery. Bless the bond between husbands and wives, and between parents and children. Be with those married couples whom you, in your wisdom, do not give children. Bless them and cause them to be a blessing in the midst of your household.

Help us in our daily work, and protect us when we travel. Bless our work for the promotion of your kingdom and for the benefit of our country, or for the advancement of honourable personal interests. Bless the products of the soil and grant favourable weather and fruitful increase.

Enable us in our respective callings to live according to your will. May we use the talents we have received from your hand in such a way that they may not hinder but rather promote our life in your kingdom. In all temptations strengthen us so that we fight the good fight of the faith, obtain the victory, and hereafter with Christ inherit eternal life.

We pray all this in the Name of our faithful Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

(Or: ... who taught us to pray, *Our Father* ...)

3.A PUBLIC CONFESSION OF SINS AND PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON

Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, we acknowledge and confess before your divine majesty that we are poor wretched sinners. We were conceived and born in sin and corruption, and are inclined to all manner of evil and incapable by nature of doing any good. We also transgress your holy commandments continually. We grieve you by our sins and bring judgment on ourselves because of them. But, LORD, we are truly sorry for our sins, by which we have provoked you to anger. Our conscience accuses us and we acknowledge that we are to blame for our sinfulness and transgressions. Yet we plead for your mercy on the ground of the suffering of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. Have compassion on us, gracious God and Father, and forgive us our sins for the sake of His death. Grant us also the grace of your Holy Spirit, that He may teach us to confess our sins sincerely and to know our wretchedness. May He so lead us that we die to sin, rise up to a new life, and bring forth fruits of holiness and righteousness acceptable to you through Jesus Christ.

Make us understand your holy Word in accordance with your divine will, so that we may learn to put our trust in you alone and not in any creature. May our old nature with all its evil desires be put to death day by day and may we present ourselves a living sacrifice to you, to the honour of your Name and the benefit of our neighbour.

We also implore you, gracious God, to bring back to yourself in true repentance all who depart from your truth, that we all with one accord may serve you through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Or: ... who taught us to pray, *Our Father* ...)

4.A PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON

We thank you, merciful God and Father, that you have brought us to know you and your Son by your Spirit and Word and have caused your Word to be proclaimed to us. Grant that we, having received Christ Jesus the Lord, may live in Him, *rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith, as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness* *— Col. 2:7. But since we, through ignorance, unthankfulness, and discontent, do not obey you as we should, we implore you, O Lord, remember your great mercy and have compassion on us. Teach us truly to know our sins, sincerely to repent, and to amend our life. Strengthen the ministers to preach your holy Word faithfully and steadfastly. Likewise, Lord, give strength to all civil authorities, that they may use the sword entrusted to them in justice and equity.

Keep us, we implore you, from all hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, and frustrate all evil and subtle designs against your Word and your church. O Lord, do not withdraw from us your Word and Spirit, but grant us a strong faith, patience, and steadfastness in all suffering and adversity. Help and sustain your church, and deliver your people from opposition, ridicule, and tyranny. We pray in particular for _____ . Strengthen those who are weak and burdened with sorrow. Grant us your peace through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who gave us this sure promise: *I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name* — John 16:23, Amen.

(Or: and who taught us to pray, *Our Father* ...)

5.A PRAYER BEFORE THE EXPLANATION OF THE CATECHISM

Heavenly Father, your Word is perfect, reviving the soul; your testimony is sure, making wise the simple. Your gospel is the power unto salvation to everyone who believes. We, however, are by nature blind and incapable of doing any good. Therefore we implore you, illumine our darkened minds by your Holy Spirit. Give us a humble heart, free from all conceit and worldly wisdom, which is enmity against you, so that, hearing your Word, we may rightly understand it and let ourselves be governed by it. Confirm us in our catholic and undoubted Christian faith. Graciously bring back those who are leaving your truth, that we all in unity may serve you in true holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. We ask these things only for the sake of Christ. Amen.

(Or: Who taught us to pray, *Our Father* ...)

6.A PRAYER AFTER THE EXPLANATION OF THE CATECHISM

Gracious God and merciful Father, we thank you that you have established your covenant with the believers and their children. You have not only sealed this by holy baptism, but also show it daily by preparing praise to yourself out of the mouths of children and infants, whereby the wise and prudent of this world are put to shame. You reveal it also by teaching us your ways and will in Christ Jesus our

Lord. You gave pastors and teachers to equip the saints for serving you so that the body of Christ may be built up. We implore you to continue to work in the hearts of all the children of the covenant, both old and young, in order that we all may grow in the knowledge of your grace in Christ until we reach complete maturity in Him. May we, by your power, not be tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching. Bless our families and endow the parents by your Spirit with wisdom from above, that they may bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. We pray for all teaching which is based on your holy Word, as we have summarized it in the confessions of the church. Be with all who labour in it and provide them with knowledge and wisdom which is rooted in the fear of your Name. Put to shame those who are high and mighty in their own eyes and in the estimation of the world. May by the godliness of your people, the kingdom of Satan be destroyed and the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in all your churches be strengthened, to the glory of your holy Name and unto our salvation.

All this we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ Your Son, Amen.

(Or: Who taught us to pray, *Our Father . . .*)

7. A PRAYER BEFORE MEALS

Almighty God, faithful Father, you have made the world and uphold it by your powerful Word. You did provide Israel in the desert with food from on high. Will you also bless us, your humble servants, and renew our strength by these gifts, which, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have received from your bountiful, fatherly hand. Give that we may use them in moderation. Help us to put them to use in a life devoted to you and your service, for we do acknowledge that you are our Father and the Source of all good things. Grant also that at all times we may long for the lasting food of your Word. May we so be nourished to everlasting life, which you have prepared for us by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour. In His Name we pray. Amen.

8. THANKSGIVING AFTER MEALS

Lord God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for the food and drink which we have enjoyed in this meal, and for all your gracious gifts, which we continually receive out of your hand. We thank you especially for your divine Word which we were allowed to read together. Through it you have caused us to be born anew to a living hope, which you have revealed in the holy gospel. Merciful God and Father, we pray, let our hearts not be weighed down by the cares of this life nor become too deeply attached to earthly and perishable things. Grant us your grace, that in our daily tasks we may seek the things which are above, expecting our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is coming on the clouds for our deliverance.

We give our thanks and submit our prayer in His Name. Amen.

9. A PRAYER FOR THE SICK AND THE SPIRITUALLY DISTRESSED

Merciful God and Father, you give eternal hope and salvation to the living and eternal life to the dying. You alone have life and death in your hands, and Christ alone has the keys of death and of the grave. All things are in your power so that

neither health nor sickness, good nor evil, life nor death can happen to us without your will. We also know that by your power and direction all things must serve our salvation. Gracious Father, we implore you to grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that He may teach us truly to know our misery and to bear patiently with your chastisements. If you O Lord kept a record of our sins these chastisements should have been ten thousand times more severe. We believe that they are not evidence of your wrath but of your fatherly love towards us, that we might not be condemned with the world.

LORD strengthen our faith by your Holy Spirit, so that we become more and more united with Christ our Head, since it is your good pleasure to unite us to Him in both suffering and glory. Enable us to bear what is brought upon us by your fatherly wisdom. We submit ourselves entirely to your will, whether you leave us on earth or whether you take us home unto yourself. We trust that with body and soul, both in life and in death, we belong to Christ, whose resurrection is the guarantee of our blessed resurrection.

Grant that we may experience the comfort of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. May His innocent blood wash away the dirt of our sins and may His righteousness cover our unrighteousness in your sight. Arm us with faith and hope, so that we may overcome the assaults of Satan and not be put to shame by any fear of death. When our eyes grow dim, let your eyes be open toward us. When you take away from us the ability to speak will you then hear the sighing of our hearts. When our hands have lost their strength, continue to support and carry us on your everlasting arms.

Father, we commit our spirit into your hands. Deal with us according to your promise. Never forsake us, but always be with us, even in the hour of death.

Hear and answer us for the sake of Christ, our dear Saviour. Amen.

(Or: Who taught us to pray, *Our Father* . . .)

10. A PRAYER FOR THE SICK AND THE SPIRITUALLY DISTRESSED

Righteous God and merciful Father, you are the Almighty, without whose will nothing occurs in heaven or on earth. Life and death are also in your hand. We are not worthy to call upon you and, if you should keep a record of our sins we could not hope that you would hear us and answer us. We pray that you will look upon us according to your mercy in Christ Jesus, who carried our sorrows and was pierced for our transgressions. We acknowledge that of ourselves we are incapable of doing any good and are inclined to all evil. Therefore we are justly chastised and disciplined by you and yet we do not nearly receive what we deserve.

Lord, you have made us your people and you are our God. Your mercy, which you have never withheld from those who turn to you, is our only refuge. We pray, therefore, do not hold our sins against us but impute to us the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, so that in Him we may stand before you. Graciously grant us recovery, take this suffering and sickness away from us, and bless the means of healing you have provided. If it pleases you to prolong our trial, give us patience and strength to bear it all according to your will. You are wise and good. May, whatever you decide, serve the renewal of our life.

Lord rather chastise us here, than that we should perish with the world hereafter. Grant that we may forsake the world and crucify our old nature, and that

we may more and more be renewed after the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never be separated from your love, but draw us closer to you from day to day. Grant that we with joy we may fulfill our calling, which is to die with Christ, to rise with Him triumphantly, and to live with Him eternally. We believe that you will hear us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Or: Who taught us to pray, *Our Father . . .*)

11. A MORNING PRAYER

Merciful Father, we thank you that in your great faithfulness you kept watch over us during this past night. Strengthen and guide us by your Holy Spirit, that we may use this new day and all the days of our life in holiness and righteousness. Grant that we in all our undertakings may always have your glory foremost in our minds. May we always work in such a manner that we expect all results and fruits of our work from your generous hand alone.

We ask that you will graciously forgive all our sins according to your promise, for the sake of the passion and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through your grace we are heartily sorry for all our transgressions. Illumine our hearts, that we may lay aside all works of darkness and as children of light may walk in the light and live a new life in all godliness.

Bless the proclamation of your divine Word here and in the mission fields. Strengthen all faithful labourers in your vineyard.

We pray for those whom you have set over us, that as servants of you, the King of kings and Lord of lords they may rule according to the calling you give them. Give endurance to all who are persecuted because of their faith and deliver them from their enemies. Destroy all the works of the devil. Comfort the distressed. Show your mercy and help to all who call upon your holy Name in sickness and other trials of life. Deal with us and with all your people according to your grace in Christ Jesus our Lord, who assured us that you will do whatever we ask in His Name. Amen.

12. AN EVENING PRAYER

Merciful God, in whom is no darkness at all, we come before you at the end of this day. We thank you that you have given us strength for our daily work, and have guided us safely through this day. Bless what was good in our labour and conduct.

We pray that you will give us peaceful and undisturbed rest so that we may be able to take up our daily task again. Command your angels to guard us and cause your face to shine upon us. We cast all our anxieties on you, for you take care of us.

Control our sleep and rule our hearts, in order that we may not be defiled in any way but may glorify you even in our nightly rest. Defend and protect us against all assaults of the devil and take us into your divine protection.

We confess that we did not spend this day without grievously sinning against you. In your mercy please cover our sins as you cover the earth in the darkness of the night.

Grant comfort and rest to all who are ill, bowed down with grief, or afflicted with spiritual distress. your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not abandon the works of your hands.

All this we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

13. AN OPENING PRAYER FOR ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES

Heavenly Father, merciful God, it has pleased you according to your infinite wisdom and lovingkindness to gather a church unto yourself out of the peoples of the earth. Through your Word and Spirit, you govern her through the service of men. You have graciously called us to be office-bearers and have charged us to keep watch over ourselves and all the flock which Christ has bought with His precious blood.

In your name we are now together to deal with matters concerning the upbuilding and welfare of your churches and to do so in an ecclesiastical manner. We realize that we are unworthy and unable of ourselves to think, speak, or accomplish any good. We implore you, that your Holy Spirit may govern us in our deliberations and decisions and may lead us into your truth.

Keep all misunderstanding away from us and guard us against the sinful inclinations of our hearts. May your Word be our only rule and standard, so that our work may glorify your Name, serve the well-being of your churches, and bring peace to our consciences.

We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

14. A CLOSING PRAYER FOR ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you that in the gathering and preservation of your church in our country you are pleased to use our services. You have graciously ordered all things so that your gospel can be preached without hindrance and we may engage in public worship and have our ecclesiastical assemblies. At the close of this meeting we humbly ask forgiveness for the shortcomings and sins which did not remain hidden from your eyes. We bring thanks for the good we received from your fatherly hand. Will you, O faithful God and Father, bless all decisions taken in agreement with your holy Word. Preserve your church by the purity of doctrine, by the proper administration and use of the sacraments, and by the faithful exercise of church discipline.

Destroy all wicked counsels conceived against your Word and church, and strengthen the ministers to preach your gospel boldly and steadfastly.

Give perseverance to the overseers and the deacons, that they may be a blessing to your people through the faithful administration of their offices.

Bless our Queen and her house, that she may reign by your wisdom. So govern the civil authorities that they may rule in justice and with wise restraint. May their rule be directed to your supremacy as the King of rulers and ruled alike. Let in this way the shameful and wicked dominion of Satan be increasingly broken down. Grant that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way.

Hear us, O God and Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

15. AN OPENING PRAYER FOR THE MEETINGS OF THE DEACONS

Merciful God and Father, you have not only declared that we will always have the poor with us, but have also commanded us to support them in their need. You have ordained the service of deacons for your church, in order that the needy members may receive the necessary support. You have called us to the office of deacon in this congregation, and we are now assembled in your Name to deal with the matters pertaining to our office. We humbly implore you to dwell among us with the Spirit of discretion. Grant us His help, that we may be able to establish who are the ones that are truly in need. Lead us to them and help us to distribute the offerings that have been collected in a spirit of joy, fidelity, and liberality.

Kindle fervent love for the needy in the hearts of your people, that they may generously contribute to them as your stewards. Grant us sufficient means to bring relief to the needy. May we discharge the duties of our office as Christ's ministers of mercy.

Give us your grace to relieve needs by means of material gifts and to instill the comfort of your holy Word into the hearts of the afflicted, that they may put their trust in you alone. Bless, we pray, our work of mercy that we all may praise and thank you, while we await the blessed appearance of your Son, Jesus Christ, who became poor for our sakes that He might enrich us with eternal treasures.

In His Name we pray. Amen.

2.7. Website Committee

Report to GENERAL SYNOD NEERLANDIA 2001 from the COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL WEBSITE

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit our report to General Synod Neerlandia 2001, as mandated by General Synod Fergus 1998.

I. COMMITTEE MANDATE

A. Background

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* reported to General Synod Fergus 1998:

“The requests we received for material taken from the *Book of Praise* in a format other than the paper format we currently have, leads us to suggest that Synod appoint a church to develop and maintain a formal web page of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.”

On the basis of this report, General Synod Fergus 1998 concluded:

“Synod concurs with the Committee to make available the *Book of Praise* in an electronic format and to develop and maintain a formal presence on the internet. Consideration must be directed to the matter of copyright and the matter of cost. Instead of appointing a particular church to maintain the web-page, several brothers who are competent in these matters can be appointed for this purpose.”